

Accessing Census Bureau Data for Municipal Planning: American Community Survey

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What is the American Community Survey?

- Replaces the decennial census long form
- A continuous survey
 - 290,000 addresses surveyed monthly
 - 3.5 million every year
- Estimates, not counts, of population and housing characteristics
- Collection began in 2005

ACS Estimates are for Periods of Time

- Estimates describe the average characteristics over a defined time period
- Decennial census, by contrast, is for a specific point in time (e.g. April 1, 2010)
- ACS time periods are for 1 year, 3 years, or 5 years (12 months, 36 months, or 60 months, inclusive)

ACS Data Releases

- 1-year data
 - For areas with population > 65,000
 - *Released in September of following year*
- 3-year data
 - For areas with population > 20,000
 - *Released in November of following year*
 - *To be discontinued – FY 2016*
- 5-year data
 - For all geographic areas, down to block group level
 - *Released in December of following year*

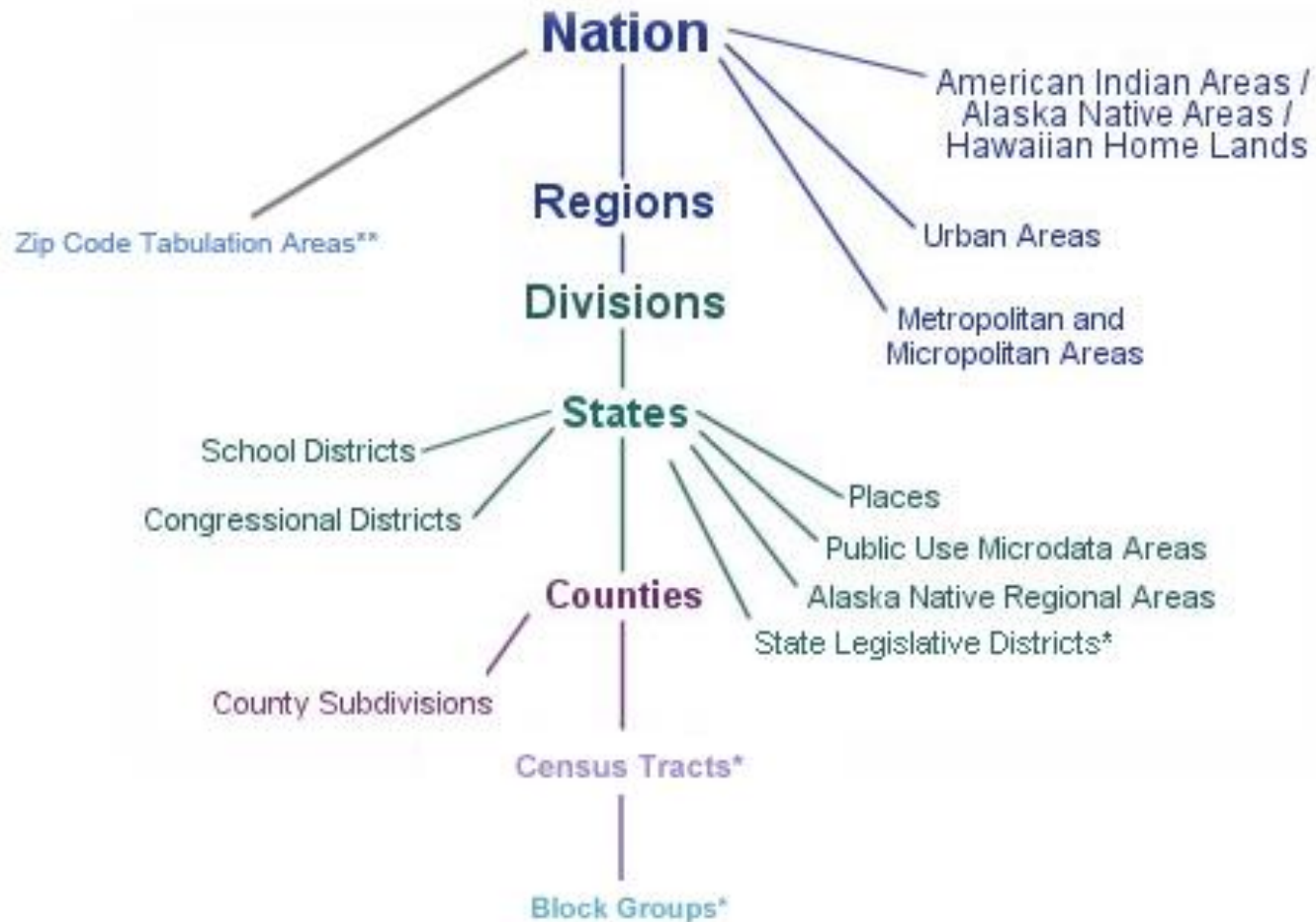
Comparing Data Sets

- Should not compare data sets covering different amounts of time (e.g. 1-year data should not be compared with 3-year data)
- Instead, use the time period which is available for all geographies
- Would also use data from longer time period if margins of error are too great for shorter time periods

Sampling Error

- The uncertainty associated with an estimate that is based on data gathered from a sample of the population rather than the entire population
- **Margin of Error (MOE)** measures the precision of an estimate at a given level of confidence
- Published ACS data includes MOEs at 90% confidence level for all estimates

A Look at Census Geographies



Towns and Places

- In New Hampshire, towns and cities are classified as County Subdivisions
- Cities are also classified as Places
- Areas of dense population within towns may be delineated as Census-Designated Places

Census Tracts and Block Groups

- Census Tracts
 - Anywhere from 1,200 to 8,000 persons (480 to 3,200 housing units)
 - Optimum population around 4,000 persons or 1,600 housing units
- Block Groups
 - Subdivisions of tracts, with 600 to 3,000 persons (240 to 1,200 housing units)
- ACS data is available down to the Block Group level, not individual blocks

Visualizing Census Geographies

- Use TIGERweb:
 - tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerweb/

Ways to Access ACS Data

- NH Office of Energy and Planning
 - State Data Center:
www.nh.gov/oep/data-center/acs/
- U.S. Census Bureau
 - Census Explorer:
www.census.gov/censusexplorer/
 - American Factfinder: factfinder.census.gov/